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SUBJ: SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION WEEK

1. NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK IS 6-12 MAY 2001. THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY HAS SELECTED THIS YEARS THEME AS "SUICIDE RISK ACROSS CULTURES." BASED ON RECENT RESEARCH, THIS THEME REINFORCES THE FACT THAT SUICIDE CUTS ACROSS ETHNIC, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND AGE BOUNDARIES. THE COAST GUARD CULTURE IS NO EXCEPTION. SADLY, IN FY00 SEVEN MEMBERS TOOK THEIR LIFE BY SUICIDE, IN FY01 WE HAVE ALREADY HAD TWO ADDITIONAL SUICIDES.

2. WHY FOCUS ON SUICIDE? HERE ARE SOME REVEALING FACTS:

A. SUICIDE IS STILL THE EIGHTH LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN THE U.S., CLAIMING 30,000 LIVES PER YEAR.

B. SUICIDE RATES AMONG YOUTH (AGE 15-24) HAVE INCREASED MORE THAN 200 PERCENT IN THE LAST FIFTY YEARS.

C. FIREARMS ARE THE MOST COMMON METHOD OF SUICIDE.

D. FOUR TIMES MORE MEN THAN WOMEN KILL THEMSELVES, BUT THREE TO FOUR TIMES MORE WOMEN ATTEMPT SUICIDE.

E. MOST SUICIDAL PEOPLE GIVE DEFINITE WARNING SIGNALS OF THEIR SUICIDAL INTENTIONS, BUT OTHERS ARE OFTEN UNAWARE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE WARNINGS OR UNSURE OF WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM.

3. IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT MOST SUICIDAL PEOPLE DESPERATELY

WANT TO LIVE, THAT THEY ARE UNABLE TO SEE ALTERNATIVES TO THEIR PROBLEMS, AND THAT SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE. SUICIDE PREVENTION SHOULD BE MUCH MORE THAN A WEEK LONG OBSERVANCE. IT SHOULD BE THE ENTIRE UNITS CONCERN. EACH OF US IN THE COAST GUARD SHOULD MAKE IT OUR INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY TO BECOME AWARE OF SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SUICIDE. IF YOU KNOW OF A FRIEND, LOVED ONE, CO-WORKER OR FAMILY MEMBER THAT IS EXHIBITING SUICIDAL TENDENCIES BRING IT TO THE ATTENTION OF SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP. SOME OF THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS ARE:

A. EXTREME HOPELESSNESS

B. A LACK OF INTEREST IN WORK OR ACTIVITIES THAT WERE PREVIOUSLY PLEASURABLE

C. INCREASED ANXIETY AND/OR PANIC ATTACKS

D. TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE OR A PRIOR HISTORY OF THREATENED OR ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

E. STARTING TO GIVE AWAY POSSESSIONS

F. IRRITABILITY AND AGITATION

G. WITHDRAWING FROM FRIENDS AND/OR SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

H. EXPERIENCING DRASTIC CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR

4. IT IS VERY HARD FOR SOMEONE WHO IS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULT TIMES TO REACH OUT AND ASK FOR HELP. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN THE MILITARY CULTURE, WHERE THERE MAY BE FEAR OF RETRIBUTION OR A PERCEPTION OF WEAKNESS IN OBTAINING HELP. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH CO OR OINC TO ASSURE THEIR MEMBERS THAT THIS WILL NOT HAPPEN, THAT COMING FORTH AND ASKING FOR HELP IS A SIGN OF STRENGTH, AND THAT MEMBERS WILL GET THE SUPPORT AND HELP THEY NEED.

5. IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW NEEDS HELP IN ADDRESSING SUICIDE RELATED

ISSUES, THERE ARE MANY OPTIONS TO CONSIDER WITHIN THE COAST GUARD. THE

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) IS A CONFIDENTIAL PROGRAM THAT, IN ADDITION TO SUICIDE, CAN HELP WITH A RANGE OF PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS. TO OBTAIN ASSISTANCE, 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK, 365

DAYS A YEAR, ONE MAY CALL 1-800-222-0364. ANOTHER SOURCE OF HELP IS THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM COORDINATOR (EAPC) AT EACH INTEGRATED SUPPORT COMMAND AND AT COAST GUARD HEADQUARTERS. TO CONTACT THE NEAREST EAPC CALL 1-800-872-4957 FOLLOWED BY THE EXTENSION LISTED NEXT

TO THESE ISC LOCATIONS: ALAMEDA (252), BOSTON (301), CLEVELAND (309), HONOLULU (314), KETCHIKAN (317), KODIAK (563), MIAMI (307), NEW ORLEANS (308), PORTSMOUTH, (305), SAN PEDRO (311), SEATTLE (313), ST LOUIS (302), AND WASHINGTON, DC (932).

6. COAST GUARD CLINICS AND TRICARE PRIMARY CARE MANAGERS CAN ALSO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE. MEDICAL PROVIDERS ARE PREPARED TO HELP PEOPLE WITH SUICIDE, DEPRESSION, AND OTHER MEDICALLY RELATED ISSUES. SOME PERSONNEL MAY PREFER THE CONFIDENTIALITY AND COMFORT OFFERED BY A CHAPLAIN. A CHAPLAIN'S REASSURANCE AND UNDERSTANDING CAN OFTEN HELP A PERSON WHO IS DEPRESSED OR CONTEMPLATING SUICIDE FIND THE STRENGTH TO DEAL WITH THEIR PROBLEMS.

7. TO ENSURE THAT ALL PERSONNEL ARE MADE AWARE OF THESE OPTIONS, COS AND OINCS ARE ENCOURAGED TO SHARE THIS INFORMATION WITH THEIR COMMANDS

AT PERIODIC ALL-HANDS MEETINGS. IN ADDITION, COMMANDS SHALL PROVIDE ANNUAL SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING, WHICH CAN BE OBTAINED BY CALLING THE REGIONAL WORK-LIFE STAFF EAPC, WHO WILL ARRANGE FOR AND CONDUCT THIS TRAINING.

8. THE IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR EACH CO AND OINC TO COMMUNICATE TO EACH MEMBER OF TEAM COAST GUARD IS THAT SUICIDAL THOUGHTS SHOULD NOT BE KEPT TO ONESELF; HELP IS AVAILABLE. THE COAST GUARD ENCOURAGES AND SUPPORTS ITS MEMBERS TO COME FORWARD AND ASK FOR HELP WITHOUT FEAR OF RETRIBUTION. GETTING HELP IN A TIMELY MANNER WILL ALLOW EACH OF US TO RESOLVE OUR PROBLEMS AND CONTINUE AS PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COAST GUARD. WE MUST EACH DO OUR BEST TO ENCOURAGE THOSE AROUND US WHO ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY DEALING WITH A PROBLEM TO REACH OUT TO A FRIEND, A THERAPIST, A FAMILY MEMBER, A RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL LEADER OR TO THE SUPPORT NETWORK PROVIDED BY THE COAST GUARD.

9. SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE. BE PROACTIVE, BE AWARE, GET INVOLVED. OFFER HOPE THAT ALTERNATIVES ARE AVAILABLE. YOU MAY JUST HELP TO SAVE

A LIFE.

10. INTERNET RELEASE AUTHORIZED.

11. RADM JOYCE M. JOHNSON, USPHS, DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND SAFETY, SENDS.

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